**Impact of shortage of containers**

1025. SHRIMATI N. P. DURGA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that non-availability of adequate containers and their detention by the customers have hit India's exporting community and ship agents; and

(b) if so, its impact on exports during the last three years, year-wise due to non-availability of containers in the country?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI E.V.K.S. ELANGOVAN): (a) and (b) Non-availability of an adequate number of containers have affected India's exports in September and October, 2004 to a certain extent. The impact of nonavailability of an adequate number of containers on exports is not quantifiable.

**Free Trade Agreement**

1026. SHRI RAVI SHANKAR PRASAD:
SHRI B. J. PANDA:

Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government have signed Free Trade Agreements with ASEAN and Africa in addition to Thailand; and

(b) if so, the details of this FTA policy and the benefits that would accrue both to the Centre and the States to boost their exports?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI E.V.K.S. ELANGOVAN): (a) While the Government has signed a Framework Agreement aiming at a Free Trade Area within a fixed timeframe with ASEAN and Thailand, no Free Trade Agreement has been signed with Africa.

(b) The Framework Agreements provide for establishment of a Free Trade Area in goods, services and investment as well as economic cooperation in identified areas. Preferential market access would be made available to the exporters of the signatory parties and it is expected that

the trade and investment flows would increase both ways with joint ventures and backward-forward linkages between the industries of the two sides. However, the same would also depend on the complementarities and comparative advantages of various industries.

**Indo-Russia Trade**

1027. SHRI S.M. LALJAN BASHA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether a Joint Inter Governmental Commission between India and Russian Federation has been set up to identify new areas of trade co-operation;

(b) if so, the details of the objectives of this Joint Commission;

(c) the areas of trade in which the Russian Federation has expressed interest;

(d) the steps Government are taking to increase trade and exports to the Russian Federation this year; and

(e) the details of any strategy and action evolved in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI E.V.K.S. ELANGOVAN): (a) to (c) During his meeting with visiting Deputy Prime Minister of Russian Federation to India in November, 2004, Commerce and Industry Minister has suggested for setting up of a Joint Study Group (JSG) as a first step for beginning discussions on a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement. Details of the same are being worked out.

(d) to (e) To enhance India's exports to Russia, Government has taken a number of steps which include promotion of dialogue at the highest level, constant review through the Joint Commission/Working Group/Sub-Group mechanism, promoting direct business contacts through exchange of delegations, Joint Business Councils, holding of exhibitions, participation in fairs etc. In addition to this, w.e.f. April, 2004, Russia has also been included as a Focus Country in the ongoing phase of the Focus CIS Programme aimed at developing and enhancing India's trade with countries of the CIS Region. Details of the programme are available on Department's website, *www.commerce.nic.in* under the head Trade Promotion Programmes'.